

The Power of Data

John Wash Elementary, CA
Wes Sever

Interview Transcript

My name is Wes Sever, principal of John Wash Elementary.

Data _____ really everything we do. In fact, when we look at data, what's important is that we don't get data overload, but we are looking at data that can make the most difference in the classroom. We sit down in grade-level teams. We call them Student Growth and Curriculum Conferences, where the _____ meet a half day with the principal, myself, and my curriculum support provider, and we go over the data.

When I first became a principal, I'd give them all the data _____ that I had. Well, they were staring at these things, some were getting confused, they didn't understand why are we getting this, why are we looking at it; it was more work for them. And data shouldn't be _____ work. Data should give us more of a focus in the classroom, and that's what we've got to target. And after that, I learned that, as a principal, I need to screen the data.

When we examine data, a lot of people don't readily understand the significance of the _____. And so we really sit down with our teachers by grade level and explain the specific data, and what it means, and how they can _____ it to their classroom. Some data, you get these big numbers and what do they really mean?

And a lot of data, we really have to look at our past history. And if we get information on 84% of your students got these problems right, well, what does that really mean? Is that _____ than what it was last year? It doesn't really help in isolation. So we really look at past scores so that we can say, you know what, 85% of our kids got this question correct; last year only 70% of our students got that correct. What does that _____? That means that we are more effective in the classroom for teaching that specific standard. And so we look at data, and data that's in isolation that we don't understand, we put aside and we go on to data that we can learn from. And that is important to explain that to teachers.

The _____ of data is that you're looking at what's happening in your classroom with these particular students. The issue that we had several years ago with data is that at each _____ level, teachers were giving different assessments. That's a problem because on a day-to-day basis, teachers need to be communicating on the success of their children, on whether their children are _____. And the only way we can determine if they are learning is their performance on particular assessments. We have what we call the Pacing Calendar for assessments.

The grade levels give _____ common assessments. So every assessment that is given, you will know that my peer also gave that particular assessment. And that's important because we can focus our conversations on the learning of students. We might not bring the data for every assessment, but you know what? If my class bombs an assessment and they don't do very well, I can go to two other teachers in my grade level and talk to them about how did your students do, how did you _____ this that made it effective because my students didn't do very well.

And so, when we actually decided that this is where we need to go, the conversation started to change because we were all doing the same thing but we also all had the same expectations because we were all giving the _____ assessments. And if we were determined that hey, you know what, this assessment wasn't matching the rigor, then we all knew it and we could change it and focus on learning, not just teaching.

It is important that we stay _____. And professional development is a key to our success. It is vital that everybody that is involved in the classroom receives the same professional development so that we can _____ and grow, because not all professional development actually works in every single classroom. But you know what? If we have received the same professional development, we can share strategies and ideas, and that is so important that every single teacher at my site receives the same professional development.

In fact, it's vital that I receive the same professional development that they do. I sit and have been trained in every professional development and every _____ that they have sat through. And I have sat there with them and I have learned with them so that when we come back to John Wash, we can apply that professional development in the classroom. I go into classrooms to _____, to make you a better teacher, to make me a better principal.

I have this philosophy that every teacher comes to school not saying, “I want to teach the same way I _____ yesterday.” They are coming to John Wash saying, “I want to be a better teacher than I was yesterday.” And that’s how I treat every teacher, and that’s my job, is to make them a better _____ than they were yesterday.

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